

CommonCall: TBM volunteer John Cox an inspiration to others

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Months had passed since John Cox found himself sitting in a field surrounded by fire and smoldering embers. Months since he didn't see the rise ahead of him. Months since his plane hit the ground, shattering upon impact.

The time was filled with pain and questions and doctor visits and surgeries, a seemingly never-ending saga that led him to being, in his words: "A cripple."

After the crash, his left leg was amputated below his knee, and his right leg was so mangled it healed slightly at angle. Cox sat and watched as his children moved him to Whitesboro. He was helpless.

"I'm through," Cox thought.

'Maybe I can do that'

Cox continued to mope and struggle, wondering about his purpose in life. Then his neighbor told him he was going to brick a church. Cox couldn't fight his curiosity.

"That old man can't do that kind of stuff. I'm going to go watch him," he said.

Sure enough, Cox's neighbor went to work. Day after day, he moved buckets of bricks and placed them around the church. Finally, Cox had had

enough.



John Cox discovered new joy when he began serving with a TBM Builders crew.
(TBM Photo)

“I can do that,” he said. “I went and grabbed one. I didn’t get in anybody’s way, just ran up there and set it down. I went and got another one. Then someone said: ‘Go ahead and do something. If you do it right, everybody will be happy. If you do it wrong, everybody will tell you.’ All right, I’ll go do something.”

Just like that, Cox was part of the Texas Baptist Men Builders. He traveled extensively with the group, and with each project he learned a new skill. He became a valued member of the team on the jobsite and off. The experience filled him with energy and purpose. His mindset was changing.

“Maybe I’m not a cripple,” Cox thought. “Maybe I can do something. The next time something came up, I went with them.”

Multiple deployments in the last two decades

The next thing was entirely different. The group joined TBM volunteers responding to a disaster in Southeast Texas. He didn't know much about what he could do, but as before, he was a quick student. He found ways he could help.

"The ministry is about people finding what they can do, being involved in service," said Ray Gann, a TBM leader and close friend of Cox's. "John found a way to be involved in service and to help people."



John Cox, who lost one leg and severely injured his other leg in a plane crash, found a new lease on life as a TBM volunteer. (TBM Photo)

The trip was the first of many disaster relief deployments over the next two decades for Cox. The locations and disasters are a blur in his memory, but

the camaraderie is clear. He remembers conversations between volunteers and ways they've prayed for and helped each other. Together, they've delivered help, hope and healing in the midst of heartbreak again and again.

"When you deploy with a group of people, especially in the difficult ones, and you live through that with each other, I call that shared sacrifice," Gann said. "When you go through shared sacrifice, you become family. John is part of the family."

Cox does it all—including hard, mundane tasks—with a smile, despite the pain caused by 10-hour long workdays as part of a TBM feeding unit. His legs often hurt him, sometimes severely.

"One of the disasters, I got a blister on my knee," he said. "I put a Band-Aid on my knee. Then I put another one and another one. It didn't work. Every time I put one on, it'd make a blister in another place."

"I decided I'd quit. I went and laid down. I knew we'd be going home in a few days. Ray Gann came in and we talked. He said, 'Let's just turn it over to the Lord.' And we did. We prayed right there. I laid back down, and he went back to work. After a little while, I had to go back to work."

God gives the strength

God gives the 84-year-old strength to carry on, Cox said.

"On these trips, it seems it seems like the first night, I'm not going to get up the next morning," he said. "Then the next day, I get up because I can do it. The next night, maybe I'll take it easy. By the third day, I'm golden. It takes the third day to get rolling."

Gann looks up to Cox, amazed by the way he serves.

“We’ve become very close,” Gann said. “I was not a kid who had heroes growing up. I just didn’t do that. As I became an adult, I started to have heroes. John is one of my heroes. He’s a guy who wants to deploy, he wants to go. He loves to go. It is my privilege to take him. He inspires me with his determination to do all that he can as long as he can do it.”

TBM honored Cox recently with the Robert E. Dixon Award for his longstanding exemplary service.

“John represents TBM’s commitment to doing whatever it takes to help others,” TBM Executive Director Mickey Lenamon said. “God gives each of us skills and abilities to use for his glory. It’s my prayer that each of us utilizes those gifts as much as John does his.”

Fresh off another deployment to Southeast Texas, this time in the wake of catastrophic flooding caused by Tropical Depression Imelda, Cox was shocked by the honor. He simply wants to do his part to help others in the name of Christ.

“What I decided is if God wants me here, I’ll be here. If he doesn’t want me here, I’ll go. He hasn’t told me to leave, so I’m still here.”

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